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AUTHOR Seiferth, Berniece B.
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ABSTRACT

Recent research demonstrates that one in five school districts is under pressure to purge objectionable books from its libraries and classrooms. This paper briefly summarizes literature and court decisions dealing with censorship in the schools and describes a study of censorship in Illinois schools. In the study, a 69-item questionnaire asked 200 high school principals to rate the amount and origin of censorship in the areas of teaching methods and textbook content and to identify persons responsible for selecting textbooks and library materials. The findings indicate that, while many potential items have never been a concern in the schools surveyed, controversial films and TV programs are censored most often. The highest percentage of textbooks censored were English texts, while Communism and controversial issues receive most censorship in social studies texts and sex education ranks highest among topics censored in health and science texts. Censorship originates from a wide community base, according to the study, including parents, religious groups, and local organizations. Textbook selection is made most often by teacher committees, and library materials are selected most often by librarians and teachers. (JEH)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

CENSORSHIP: CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

Berniece B. Seiferth
Professor, College of Education
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale

A recent study shows that one in every five school districts is under pressure to purge books that are offensive to someone. Titles now include "Huckleberry Finn," "Stuart Little" and Wilt Chamberlain's autobiography. "There seems to be emerging strength among groups to purge school libraries or classrooms of 'wrong ideas,'" says Leanne Kat of the National Coalition against Censorship (1981).

Censorship is of major importance to teachers, school administrators, parents and school board members at the present time. The frighteningly fundamental question of who will control the minds of children is facing hundreds of communities today. More than 100 local, state, and national organizations are attempting to aid school boards in selecting books,

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materials and curricula with preprinted reviews of books by citing sections considered questionable by members of the organizations. Consequently, in many communities people are protesting selected passages to school boards without having read the book from which they were taken. Among the well-organized and active groups are the American Education Association, America's Future, Inc., American Legislative Exchange Council, The John Birch Society, The Eagle Forum, Guardians of Education for Maine, The Heritage Foundation, plus many others.

Some of the chief targets for elimination from the school curricula are humanistic education and secular humanism, and in its place, many want to restore school prayer, moral values that are not offended by the textbooks, portrayal of woman's role as wife and mother and man's role as provider and protector, and separation of sexes for sex education, gym classes and academic and vocational classes, if desired.

A sampling of the titles of journals published by the censors of school texts includes The National Educator, The School Bell, Educational Signpost, and Professor Phonics. Prominent names in the censorship movement are Phyllis Schlafly, the late JoAnn Abrigg, and Norma and Mel Gabler.

REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

One of the most outstanding books on the subject of censorship in the schools, is Censors in the Classroom by Edward B. Jenkinson (1979). Jenkinson, Chairman of the National Council of Teachers of English Committee Against Censorship, detailed censors' attempts to impose their standards on education by censoring books, materials and curricula used in the public schools. The issues are complex and there are no simple solutions. Given the changing political and social climate of the United States today, it is almost inevitable that these so-called self-styled guardians of our morals will proliferate in their desire to change books and other curricula in the schools.

It is imperative that people on both sides of a censorship issue remain calm, if possible, and discuss problems in a rational and informed manner. Also, it is necessary that teachers, administrators and school board members, all of whom may come under attack from the self-appointed guardians, should be aware of the organization and goals of the pressure groups that their efforts may be handled effectively.

Jenkinson offers suggestions to concerned teachers and parents concerning the decision of who will open--not control-- the minds of the students. He included many direct quotes from the publications, reviews, articles or newspaper accounts of what censors have been doing in the United States and their actions speak for themselves. He leaves us with one memorable quotation: "Censorship is the tool of tyrannous societies."

Some of the legal battles that have been decided recently by various courts have been outlined by Hoffman (1980). One such case was President's Council v. Community School Board #23(457.2d 289). The School Board removed Down These Mean Streets from the junior high school libraries but later decided that the books could remain in the library but be available on loan to parents of the children in the school. The President's Council, consisting of past and present presidents of various P.T.A.'s, librarians, teachers, principals, and students, sued the board for having "transgressed the first amendment rights of plaintiff." However, the U.S. Court of Appeals, the Second Circuit, supported the action of the school board in limiting the circulation of the book.

But in a later case, board action was not sustained. In Right to Read Defense Committee v. School Committee of Chelsea (454 F.Supp. 7039), The book Male and Female was removed by the school board under questionable circumstances from the high school library after it had been in use for a year. The Right to Read Defense Committee sued the board to retain the book

and the District Court prohibited its removal. The Court concluded with this comment:

> The most effective antidote to the poison of mindless orthodoxy is ready access to a broad sweep of ideas and philosophies. There is no danger in such exposure. The danger is in mind control (p.715).

In October, 1981, the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule whether the case of Piko v. Island Trees, a Long Island, N.Y., suburb, should go to trial at the district court level. It might become the first case of school book censorship ever to reach the trial stage. This follows a ruling by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals that the school board of Long Island violated the Constitution when it removed books it regarded as "obscene" and "anti-Christian" from a school library.

The appeals court reversed a 1979 ruling by the U.S. District Court for Eastern New York, which had dismissed a complaint by students against the Island Trees Union Free School District, charging that removal of the books violated their free speech rights under the First Amendment. Titles of books removed included Soul on Ice, The Fixer, and Slaughterhouse Five.

In a stimulating article, Naylor (1978) points out that there are differences of opinion about the nature and purpose of American schools. He notes that one group of Americans regards the public schools as having as their primary function the maintenance of the status quo. For them, schools exist to instill within students an uncritical acceptance of prevailing political, economic, social and religious systems, values, and philosophies. But for another group of Americans, the public schools have a broader purpose, that of helping students to develop into viable, contributing members of their society, capable of analyzing and dealing with issues confronting them.

A classroom must be open to provide opportunities for the free development and exchange of ideas. All citizens have the right to question, scrutinize and challenge what goes on in the public schools. But when school censorship

issues arise, they must be dealt with in a rational way according to established procedures and standards which carry a strong predisposition to the right of students to be free to learn and the right of teachers to be free to teach. To do otherwise is to abandon our democratic heritage and constitutional principles.

Many schools are now adopting policies that offer parents guidelines for objecting to textbools or library books. Usual procedures would require submitting complaints to a representative panel with the right to appeal to the school board. In many instances alternate reading assignments can be given to students whose parents object to certain books.

Another writer, McGough (1977) starts with the assumption that school texts have an air of credibility about them, especially with the young. Parents have a legitimate interest in textbooks, but the question he asks is, to what degree? The issue is complex and has been a subject of parental concern for many years. Parents' complaints range from sexism to racism, politics to religion, poor print to non-acceptable format, and yet it seems only right that parents be able to request an alternative text for their individual child.

A well-known writer, Henry Miller (1978) has also turned his attention to censorship. He feels that ignorance and intolerance flourish today just as freely in schools as they do in religious institutions and that much censoring of books and other materials springs from ignorance and intolerance. He states emphatically that censoring a book means to inhibit individual thinking, freedom and growth.

That schools have become more and more a major focus of censorship efforts in recent years is the opinion of Small (1977). He further states that reading modifies and cultivates ideas and ideas give birth to change. Those who favor reading see such changes as a positive result, but others dread change and attack its causes.

In conclusion, Donelson (1979) believes that many unsuspecting people are aiding and abetting the censors in our schools. He specifically named those who want to preserve the status quo, those who want to avoid all controversy at any cost, those who fail to recognize that dirty words are used by some people in our society, those who are afraid of censorship, those who feel that they are immune to censorship, and those who hide books or rip out pages offensive to them personnally. Donelson definitely feels that reading encourages students to challenge anything in a search for truth or truths. Some truths and conditions and situations and people may be found that are distressing or unpleasant. But he contends that students live with mortals, not angels, and books tell about our relationships with one another. To restrict the students' right to know is to censor, and that teachers/librarians must oppose.

Education about the causes, methods and people involved in the censorship movement may help people to make more rational decisions. As far back as 1925, Clarence Darrow, arguing the right to teach evolution at the Scopes trial, said: "If today you can take a thing like evolution and make it a crime to teach it in the public school...at the next session you may ban books and newspapers... ignorance and fanaticism are ever busy and need feeding."

And President Eisenhower (1953) stated: "Don't join the book burners. Don't think you are going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book as long as any document does not offend your own ideas of decency. That should be the only censorship."

CENSORSHIP STATUS IN ILLINOIS

The author designed a 68-item questionnaire which was mailed to 200 high school principals randomly selected by the State Board of Education to determine the extent of censorship of teaching methods, content of English and social studies texts, and the originators of the censorship. These results were computerized and the most important findings are detailed below.

Ninety-six (48%) subjects completed the opinionaire. Of the respondents, 19 (20%) were principals in high schools enrolling less than 250 students; 19 (20%) enrolled 251-500 students; 6 (6%) enrolled 501-600 students; 5 (5%) enrolled 601-700 students and 46 (48%) enrolled over 750 students. The racial enrollment indicated that 77 (81%) of the schools reported a 76-95% enrollment of whites, 2 (2.7%) and a 76-95% black enrollment and one school had a 76-95% Hispanic enrollemnt. Blacks, Hispanics and Orientals usually accounted for 5-25% of enrollment in the schools.

Findings

The high school pricipals participating in the survey indicated that many of the potential items for censorship on the opinionaire had never been a matter of concern in their schools. The never-censored items responses ranged from 23% for some items to 87% for others. Although censorship certainly exists in Illinois as well as the nation as a whole, the principals who responded are not being overwhelmed by censors.

The respondents were asked to rate the amount of censorship encountered in their schools in the areas of teaching methods, content of English, social studies, science/health textbooks and library materials; the origin of the censorship; and persons responsible for selecting textbooks and library materials.

Table 1

Censorship of Teaching Methods

Frequently %	Occasionally %	Never %
Open-ended questions (11)	Film/TV (59)	Discovery/Inquiry (77)
Controversial films/TV (10)	Controversial Issues (58)	Open-ended questions (7
Discovery /Inquiry (10)	Controversial Speakers (54)	Role-playing (67)
Controversial Issues (8)	Open-ended quesitons (18)	Controversial Issues/ Speakers (34)

By combining the items in the frequently and occasionally columns, it would appear that the use of controversial films/TV and controversial issues are censored most often.

Table 2

Censorship of English Textbooks

Frequently %	Occasionally %	Never %
Pornography (27)	Violence (42)	Study of black authors (77)
Obscenity (22)	Sex-role Stereotyping (40)	No black authors included (7
Racist statements (11)	Supernatural/occult (40)	Reputation of author (70)
Illustrations (10)	Obscenity (40)	Book leads to rejection of parent/God/country (60)

Obscenity was censored in 62% of the schools to some degree. Teachers of English have been the target of many censorship attempts nation-wide and a higher percentage of censorship was exerted on English texts than any of the other texts included in this study.

Table 3

Censorship of Social Studies Textbooks

Frequently %	Occasionally %	Never %
Communism (9)	Controversial issues (31)	UN/global education (82)
UN/global education (9)	Communism (24)	Past mistakes of US (82)
Controversial issues (9)	Omission of accomplishments of women (18)	Holocaust (81)
Controversial figures (8)	Controversial figures (18)	Ethnic studies (80)

The inclusion of material on communism and controversial issues received most censorship for social studies texts. Teaching about the United Nations/global education did not appear to be a large problem although such material is vigorously disapproved in many communities nationwide. In fact, 82% of the principals reported no censorship in this area.

Table 4

Censorship of Science/Health Textbooks

Frequently %	Occasionally %	Never %
Sex education (14)	Abortion (59)	DNA (76)
Contraceptives (14)	Sex education (53)	Creationism (68)
Abortion (11)	Contraceptives (51)	Values Clarification (67)
Drug education (9)	Reproduction (39)	Death Education (65)

Teaching about abortion ranked highest with a 70% followed closely by sex education (67%) and contraceptives (65%) when frequently and occasionally responses are combined. Surprisingly enough, compulsory teaching of creationism, being considered by legislatures in 28 states presently, had never been censored in 68% of the reporting schools.

Table 5

Censorship of Library Materials

Frequently %	Occasionally %	Never %
Pornography (17)	Obscenity (60)	Specific dictionaries (78)
Specific Magazines (14)	Controversial Authors (39)	Reputation of authors (76)
Specific Films (14)	Specific Magazines (36)	Violence (64)
Obscenity (14)	Violence (34)	Racist/sexist language (63)

Obscenity at 74% is identified as the matter for liveliest censorship in library materials. Another amazing item here is that citizens in at least four states have taken drastic action against dictionaries that define words offensive to them and Texas has removed five well-known dictionaries from their list of recommended texts, however, 78% of the principals reported no censorship of dictionaries.

Table 6

Origin of Censorship

Frequently %	Occasionally %	Never %
Individual parent (14)	Individual parent (59)	Educational Research Analysts (81)
Religious group (9)	Religious group (43)	NOW (78)
Local organized group (5)	Local organized group (35)	Eagle Forum (72)
Educational Research Analysts, Eagle Forum, NOW, John Birch Society (2)	John Birch Society (17)	John Birch Society (69)

It is readily seen that censorship in our sample of schools came from individual parents (73%) religious groups (52%)and local organized groups (40%). In other words, the local community was involved. Outside groups had never been heard from in 69% to 81% of the schools. Furthermore, thirty-seven (40%) of the principals indicated that censorship attempts in their schools had never been successful, 46 (49%) that censorship had been successful occasionally and 6 (7%) reported attempts frequently were successful. The data also showed that in the majority of schools, 80 (74%), the selection of textbooks was made by committees of teachers while a smaller majority, 60 (66%) of library materials were selected by librarians and teachers. Although public schools are enduring a barrage of abuse presently for teaching secular humanism, only 4 principals responded that such a charge had been made while 91 (96%) reported that no such criticism had occurred.

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